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QUESTION OF EAST TIMOR

Progress report of the Secretary-General

1. In his last report (A/51/361), my predecessor updated the General Assembly on the seventh and eighth rounds of talks he had held with the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia and Portugal in January and June 1996 and on the second meeting of the All-inclusive Intra-East Timorese Dialogue held in March 1996.

2. In the same report, it was indicated that the ninth round of talks with the two Foreign Ministers would take place in New York on 21 December 1996, to be preceded by discussions between their two Permanent Representatives in New York, to be led by the Secretary-General's Special Adviser. While the contacts with the two sides continued in subsequent months, various matters not directly related to the issue impeded the holding of preparatory meetings, as originally envisaged. Consequently, at the suggestion of the Secretary-General, the ninth round of ministerial talks was postponed to a later date.

3. Since taking office, I have stressed on several occasions my intention to give a new impetus to my good offices on the question of East Timor. In February 1997, I appointed as my Personal Representative for East Timor Mr. Jamsheed Marker (Pakistan), who now represents me in all aspects of my good offices function on this issue, although I have remained personally engaged in the process. Mr. Marker immediately embarked upon a process of intensive consultations with the Governments of Indonesia and Portugal on how to revitalize the effort to find a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable solution to the problem. He travelled to Portugal from 5 to 8 March 1997 and visited Indonesia and East Timor from 20 to 31 March 1997. He

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* A/52/150 and Corr.1.

was received by President Sampaio and Prime Minister Guterres in Lisbon and by President Soeharto in Jakarta. He held extensive discussions with Foreign Ministers Gama and Alatas of Portugal and Indonesia, respectively, as well as other officials and a cross-section of East Timorese figures.

4. On the basis of the report of my Personal Representative on his consultations, I invited the two Foreign Ministers to meet with me in New York on 19 and 20 June 1997, in order to consider a revised format for the tripartite talks aimed at instituting more structured and intensive negotiations. The Ministers agreed to my proposal that the talks should continue at the working level, chaired by my Personal Representative, and that their substance would be kept confidential.[1] At the same time, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to work in a cooperative spirit in order to achieve a lasting political solution to the question of East Timor.

5. Working-level talks, led by senior Foreign Ministry officials from Indonesia and Portugal and under the chairmanship of my Personal Representative, were held in New York from 4 to 7 August 1997. Those talks, which were constructive and businesslike, will continue in a sustained and confidential manner.

6. At my meeting with them in June, the Ministers also agreed that the All-inclusive Intra-East Timorese Dialogue would continue and that my Personal Representative would carry out the necessary consultations for the early convening of the next meeting. In July 1997, the desk officer responsible for East Timor in the Department of Political Affairs was dispatched to Indonesia, East Timor and Lisbon for consultations with East Timorese figures in preparation for the next All-inclusive Intra-East Timorese Dialogue, which I hope to convene in October 1997.

7. Recently, President Nelson Mandela of South Africa took an important initiative to lend support to my good offices. During his State visit to Indonesia in July 1997, he discussed the issue of East Timor with President Soeharto and, with the agreement of his host, he met with Mr. 'Xanana' Gusmao, the East Timorese pro-independence leader serving a 20-year jail term. Upon his return, he briefed me about his discussions in Jakarta, reiterating that his interest was in assisting the efforts of the United Nations on this issue and not in opening a separate negotiating track. Subsequently, I dispatched Ambassador Marker to South Africa, and he held a very useful meeting with the President in Pretoria on 26 August 1997. I warmly welcome this important initiative by President Mandela.

Notes

[1] Press release SG/2035 dated 23 June 1997.